The Incident Command System

An Introduction for Long-Term Care Facilities

Introduction

We are all vulnerable to a variety of hazards. Each day emergencies occur. Most are handled locally, within the organization or with the assistance of those who respond to emergency calls. Many require the support of agencies with additional resources and/or different skills. These may include: tornadoes, wind, rain, snow and ice storms, fires, floods, earthquakes, power outages, hurricanes, tsunamis, civil unrest, hazardous material spills, personnel issues, vehicle accidents, violent intruders, terrorism, or highly communicable diseases, such as a pandemic influenza. Those who respond must be able to coordinate their activities. Success is based on everyone who responds being aware of accepted procedures, terms, and communication methods.

Through a Presidential Directive (HSPD5), all Federal, State, local, and tribal entities are required to adopt and utilize the National Incident Management System, of which Incident Command System is a key element. Hospitals and health care organization have also realized the importance of a coordinated effort and have adopted the Hospital Incident Command System (HICS). Businesses, faith-based and other volunteer organizations, social services agencies, and all who may respond to an emergency or disaster, are expected to know and use Incident Command. It is equally important that those who care for vulnerable populations know and utilize this nationally accepted method to manage incidents. It is critical for all involved, staff and those who may be called upon to assist, to clearly understand who is in charge. The rapid establishment of the Chain of Command and knowing how to communicate during the event promotes timely actions, reduces stress, and may save lives.

Objectives

Participants will:

- Describe the purpose and key features of the Incident Command System.
- Identify the key roles of the Incident Command System and responsibilities respective to each role.
- Describe how the Incident Command System model can be used in Senior Living and Long Term Care Facilities during an emergency or disaster.

"Do you know?" boxes can be found throughout this module to encourage you to seek answers. This information will increase your ability to respond to an emergency

Note:

Within the document you will find words underlined. These words are defined, as applied to Incident Command, in the orange boxes placed within the module.

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INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

ICS is a management system that is used to achieve optimal command and control within an organization, or may be used to coordinate the efforts of many agencies, during any type and size of emergency

Hundreds of families were left homeless, many people died, one-half million acres burned, 700 structures destroyed, and hundreds of millions of dollars of damage occurred due to catastrophic wildfires that ravaged California in the 1970's. Most would think devastation of this magnitude would be the result of lack of resources or inability to respond. This was not the case. The assessment of the response to these fires uncovered problems with coordination and communication within and between responding agencies.

A number of issues were identified related to the management of the response:

- Inadequate planning process
- Unclear chain of command or lines of authority
- Too large of a span-of-control or too many people reporting to one person
- Poor communication due to different and conflicting equipment, codes, and terminology
- No clear method to integrate and manage the numerous agencies that responded
- Unclear objectives

The need for a system to address these issues was obvious. Congress mandated that the U.S. Forest Service develop a system that would increase capabilities. A task force of cooperative agencies was created and <u>FIRESCOPE ICS</u> was developed.

FIRESCOPE ICS

Incident management system developed in response to the California wildfires.

Through FIRESCOPE ICS, a command and management system was developed, job responsibilities were assigned, and common terminology and procedures decided upon. These would be utilized for managing the day-today operations for all types of emergency events. By 1981, ICS was utilized throughout California and being adapted for utilization to manage events such as: floods, hazardous material accidents, earthquakes, and airplane crashes. It was flexible enough to manage small incidents or catastrophic events involving thousands of emergency personnel. FIRESCOPE ICS is the basis of the <u>National Incident Management System</u> utilized today by all who are called upon to respond to an emergency of any size or magnitude.

National Incident Management System (NIMS)

NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

A system mandated by the President of the United States that provides a consistent nationwide approach for all response agencies to work together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of the cause, size, or complexity.

On February 28, 2003, in response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, President George W. Bush issued a directive, HSPD5. This directed the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop and administer a National Incident Management System. The Secretary announced the establishment of NIMS in March 2004. The system is a <u>standard</u>, yet <u>flexible</u>, framework that allows Federal, State, local and tribal governments, private entities, and non-governmental organizations to

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work together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents regardless of their size, cause, or location. This includes acts of terrorism

One of the key elements of NIMS is the Incident Command System.

The Incident Command System (ICS)

The most incidents are handled within the facility or by those responding to a "9-1-1" call. If the event requires the assistance of other disciplines or municipalities, additional resources and support are requested. ICS provides a means for coordinated and collaborative incident management.

The Incident Command System allows the nation, as well as individual organizations, to effectively manage their response to events. ICS may be used in any event that requires actions to prevent or minimize: loss of life, damage to property and/or the environment.

Examples of such incidents include:

- Disease outbreaks
- Fires (structures or undeveloped lands)
- Natural disasters (hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, winter storms…)

- Hazardous material incidents (chemical spills, industrial accidents …)
- Criminal acts and investigations
- Terrorist incidents including weapons of mass destruction
- National Special Security Events (political conventions, large sporting events, Presidential visits,…)
- Planned events (parades, demonstrations, fairs …)

 ICS effectively manages incidents whether the event is contained within one organization or the assistance of local, State, Tribal, and Federal agencies is required.

These systems have been used successfully in emergency and nonemergency situations for more than 30 years by all levels of government and private organizations. The National Incident Management System requires the use of ICS for all domestic responses by all levels of government and all who respond. It is important for senior living and long term care facilities to know and understand ICS to assure the ability to communicate with those who respond and through coordination of activities more efficiently utilize resources.
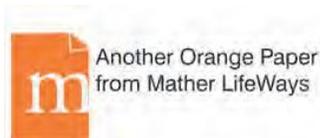
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MITIGATION

Mitigation is the measures taken to limit adverse effects.

The Incident Command System was designed to:

- Manage incidents of any kind or size
- Promote coordination
- Provide a common management structure
- Assure logistical and administrative support to operations staff
- Avoid duplication of efforts
- Control and track personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications

Common Terminology and Clear Text

During an event the ability to communicate effectively with all involved is critical. To assure successful communication, clear, easy to understand text must be used. Jargon, codes, and acronyms must be avoided.

Modular Organization

The ICS structure utilizes a top-down modular method determined by the size and complexity of the incident. As the incident increases in size or complexity, the organizational structures are flexible and expand. Responsibilities, based on the task to be performed, are delegated. In ICS, only those functions or positions necessary for the incident will be filled.

Management by Objectives

Management by objectives is utilized to assure everyone understands the actions to be taken to manage the incident. The following steps are taken to make certain these actions are communicated throughout the organization by using incident action planning.

Step 1:   Understand the agency's policies, procedures and direction.

Step 2:   Assess the situation.

Step 3:   Establish objectives.

Step 4:   Select strategy to achieve objectives.

Step 5:   Apply plans appropriate to the strategy, assign resources, and monitor performance.

Step 6:   Conduct follow-up and make necessary changes.

This method assures that the following steps are followed and are written in an "<u>incident action plan</u>"

- Establish overarching objectives.
- Develop and issue assignments, plans, procedures, and protocols.
- Establish specific measurable objectives for activities.
- Direct efforts to assure these objectives are achieved.
- Document results to measure performance.
- After the event, facilitate corrective actions.

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INCIDENT ACTION PLAN (IAP)

An IAP is a written plan containing the general objectives reflecting the strategy to manage an incident. It includes identification of resources and assignments.

Reliance on an Incident Action Plan (IAP)

In the Incident Command System, Incident Action Plans are used to communicate the objectives for managing the incident. The plan reflects the overall strategy, identifies and assigns resources to be obtained and utilized. It may include attachments that provide additional guidance. All incidents must have a verbal or written IAP. That plan provides supervisory personnel with direction and guidance to be followed during an identified period of time. These periods of time are called <u>Operational Periods.</u>

At the minimum, all Incident Action Plans must contain:

- What to do
- Who will do it
- How to communicate
- Procedures to address injuries

OPERATIONAL PERIODS

Time scheduled for executing a given set of actions, as specified in an Incident Action Plan. They may be various lengths of time but usually not more than 24 hours.

Manageable Span of Control

<u>Span of control</u> is the number of people or resources a supervisor can manage effectively during an emergency. This is important to assure safety and accountability.

The ratio may vary from three (3) to seven (7) per supervision, depending upon the incident. The recommended ratio is five (5) per supervisor.

SPAN OF CONTROL

The number of people a supervisor is responsible for. Under the National Incident Management System, the span of control is expressed as a ration. The recommended span of control is 1:5.

Chain of Command and Unity of Command

Do You Know?

During an emergency, who would you report to for guidance and information?

Who would report to you?

In the Incident Command System:

- **Chain of command** means that there is an established, orderly line of authority that within the ranks of the organization. The lower levels subordinate are connected to those with higher levels of authority.
- **Unity of command** means that every individual has a designated supervisor to whom he or she reports at the scene of an incident.

This method reduces the confusion caused by conflicting directives.

The command function may be carried out in two ways:

- **Single Command,** in which the Incident Commander will have complete responsibility for the management of the incident.
- **Unified Command,** in which responding agencies and/or jurisdictions with

responsibility for the incident share incident management.

Unified Command

Unified Command is used when incidents involve:

- More than one jurisdiction
- A single jurisdiction with multiple agencies that share responsibility
- Multiple jurisdictions with multi-agency involvement

When events require numerous agencies, such as: public health, hospitals, police, fire, emergency medical services (EMS), emergency management agencies (EMA), HAZMAT teams, risk management professionals, emergency and disaster management, transportation services, utility companies, American Red Cross or other such agencies, hospital, veterinary services, streets and highway departments, and public works from other cities, counties, states, or the federal government, these agencies must work together effectively and speak with one voice. Through Unified Command, this is possible.

Transfer of Command

Transfer of command or authority for management of the incident takes places if and when:

- A person with more knowledge and abilities is available to assume command.
- There is a legal reason to change command.
- The incident becomes more complex.
- The incident continues over a long or extended period of time.
- The event is over and the home organization assumes responsibility.

When transferring command, it is important to brief or inform the next person. A verbal and written report should be provided. Note: Whenever possible there should be written documentation of events, response, time, etc.

Accountability

Individuals, organizations, and agencies must follow established guidelines, policies, laws, and regulations unless there is notification from State or Federal authorities that there is a relaxation of professional regulations, based on the magnitude of the event.

ICS guidelines that must be adhered to are:

- All responders must check-in
- An Incident Action Plan must be developed and response operations must be based on that plan
- Each person involved in the incident will be assigned to only one supervisor
- Supervisors must be able to manage the resources assigned
- Supervisors must track and report the status of resources

RESOURCES
Resources are people, equipment, money, supplies, and facilities.

Information and Intelligence Management

The organization must establish procedures and processes for gathering, sharing, and managing information and intelligence.

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- of resources

INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence comes from a variety of sources, such as:

- *Weather information*
- *Structural designs*
- *Utilities and public works data*
- *Surveillance information*

ICS Organization

The ICS structure is unique from the administrative structure of any of the responding agencies. It was developed in this manner to avoid confusion with titles. People, who hold titles to fulfill their daily role, may have a different title in ICS. Examples: The Long Term Care Administrator will, in many cases, be the Incident Commander for the facility. The Business Operations Manager may be the Finance Chief.

Management Functions

To manage an incident of any type or size, certain functions must be performed. These are:

- Identify the problem
- Develop a plan

Implement the plan:

- Obtain and pay for resources
- Keep appropriate records.

The Five Major Management Functions of ICS

There are five major functions that are the basis of ICS. These apply when organizing non-emergency events, responding to a routine emergency or a major disaster. These are:
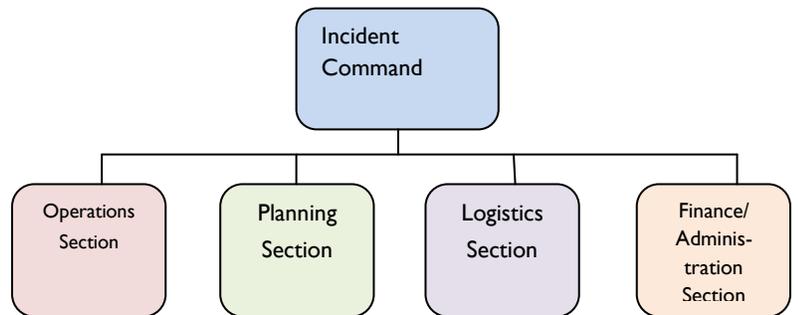
Incident Command   Responsible for the management of all activities which include:

- Develop strategies
- Set priorities
- Obtain and release resources

Planning   Responsible for:

- Collection, evaluation, and dissemination of information related to the operation
- Development of the Incident Action Plan and operational objectives
- Collect and analyze data related to the current events, forecasted situations, and status of resources

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Logistics   Obtain necessary resources and services required to support the incident management.

Operations   Conduct tactical operations to carry out the plan.

Finance/Administration   Responsible for:

- Monitoring costs related to the incident
- Time recording
- Cost analysis
- Administrative support
- Accounting

As an example of how this system may be used, let's assume your facility is located near a river. There have been days and days of heavy rain. The river is nearing the flood stage.

Incident Command would make the determination to implement the Flood Annex of your Emergency Operations Plan, assure those assigned to Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance Sections are available. Assume responsibility for the management of the incident.

The Planning Section would collect information regarding the situation, obtain and analyze the data related to flood stage, weather forecast, number of residents and their current health status, and determine what actions should be taken. This is discussed with Incident Command and it is decided and written in the Incident Action Plan. Times for expected completion are determined, as well as who would be responsible for each task. Some of the actions to be taken are:

- To evacuate the facility
- All staff would be called and told to report to work immediately
- Ambulances would be called to transport the critically ill to hospitals or other LTC facilities

- Other residents would be transported on buses a hotel out of the flood area
- A plan would be developed to determine which bus number every resident and staff travel
- Kitchen staff would transport special diet food in the facility van
- Pharmacy would transport medicine in a rented van
- Maintenance staff would move furniture and equipment to the upper levels of the facility
- Emergency Management Agency would be asked to provide assistance in obtaining sandbags
- Staff would be asked to work 12 hour shifts until the all residents are safely relocated
- Volunteers would be called to assist
- Office staff would copy computer files and take all important paperwork to an unoccupied office in the hotel

Logistics would be requested to obtain the resources necessary to carry out the above operations.

- Buses would be rented
- Drivers contacted
- Ambulances would be called
- Staff would be contacted
- Boxes for food and medicine obtained
- Furniture moving equipment rented
- Additional bedding, oxygen, and other patient care materials ordered for immediate delivery

Operations would assure all of the items listed above were carried out.

Some of the responsibilities of Finance/ Administration would be to assure:

- Money is available or credit is established
- Payroll records are maintained to assure that staff receive appropriate payment

- Records are maintained and the event appropriately documented for possible insurance of FEMA assistance
- Assure adherence to all company policies and professional regulations
- Resident whereabouts tracked

ICS Structures and Position Titles

Based on the event, the ICS structure may be expanded and divided into levels. Individuals are assigned to oversee each level. These supervisory roles have distinct ICS titles. They are used for several reasons:

- To provide a common standard. Example, if one agency uses Chief and another Manager, confusion could occur.
- ICS titles allow positions to be filled by people who are the most qualified, rather than those with seniority.
- Standard positions are used throughout the event. Therefore, when filling the position, there are certain expectations for the role. It is important to know if the role of Commander or Chief is being filled.

Organizational Structure – Incident Command

Do You Know?

What types of safety issues could occur in your facility? Examples could include:

- **Slippery, wet floors**
- **Exposed electrical wires**
- **Locked or unlocked doors (depending on the event)**
- **Overtired staff**

The Incident Commander is responsible for all activities associated with Incident Command and has overall authority and responsibility for managing the operations. It is the Incident Commander's responsibility to assure that the Incident Action Plan is created by the Planning Section and the objectives developed are achieved.

ICS is flexible, in a small event; one person may be responsible for all five management functions. In a large event, like the one previously described, each section will, in most cases, require an individual to oversee the appropriate response.

The Incident Commander must be fully briefed of the event at the initial stages and continually of the status. There should be a written delegation of authority. This document should be part of the agency's Emergency Operations Plan and implemented at the time of the event.

Incident Commander Responsibilities

The Incident Commander is responsible for managing the incident. This includes:

- Ensuring incident safety
- Providing information to internal and external stakeholders

In a SL/LTC facility, based on the event, some of the internal and external stakeholders would be:

- ✓ Staff
- ✓ Residents
- ✓ Corporate office personnel
- ✓ Staff families
- ✓ Residents' families
- ✓ Volunteers
- ✓ Responding agencies (police, fire, EMS, EMA, public health, public works, etc.)
- ✓ Media
- ✓ Community
- ✓ Health care providers

- Establishing and maintaining liaison with other agencies participating in the incident

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Based on the kind and size of the incident, Senior Living and Long -Term Care facilities may seek the assistance of:

- ✓ EMS
- ✓ EMA
- ✓ Police
- ✓ Fire
- ✓ Public Works
- ✓ Public Health
- ✓ Hospitals
- ✓ Other facilities
- ✓ Vendors
- ✓ Agencies used to transport residents

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS)

A network of services coordinated to provide assistance. Personnel are trained in rescue, stabilization, transportation, and advanced treatment of trauma. Linked by communication systems, EMS usually responds to citizens calling 911.

Selecting and Changing an Incident Commander

Do You Know?

In your organization, who would assume the responsibilities of Incident Commander?

Some examples may be: Administrator, Assistant Administrator, Director of Nursing….

Remember, a person may only work effectively for a certain period of time, and then control must be transferred.

Therefore at least three people should be able to assume this leadership position.

The Incident Commander is the most highly qualified individual trained to lead the incident response. Organizational rank and seniority should not be

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considered when determining who will be named Incident Commander.

Incidents may not end during a workable time period. To assure that the Incident Commander may be relieved from duty by someone equally as qualified, at least three individual should be trained.

When transferring command during an incident, all personnel must be made aware that the change has taken place.
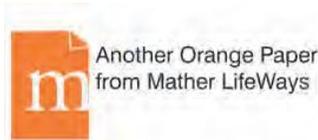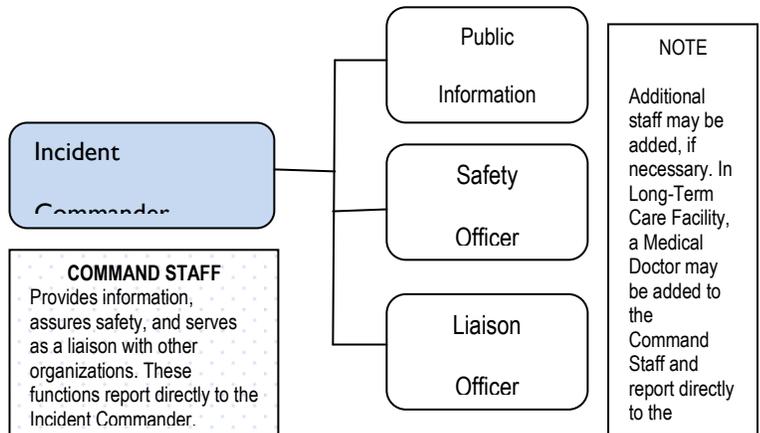
Note: In many response agencies, vests with title cards are worn to identify the Incident Commanders and others with key roles. This assures that staff, residents, and those who respond can easily identify key staff.

Organizational Structure

The primary ICS sections may be subdivided if the span-of-control is too large or to meet the needs of the incident.

- Remember, the person in charge has authority until delegated to another. In small incidents, the Incident Commander will manage all aspects. It is not until additional assistance is required that others are provided authority and given responsibility. Commander or Chief is being filled.

Expanding the Organization

Incident Commander	Public Information
	Safety Officer
	Liaison Officer

COMMAND STAFF
Provides information, assures safety, and serves as a liaison with other organizations. These functions report directly to the Incident Commander.

NOTE
Additional staff may be added, if necessary. In Long-Term Care Facility, a Medical Doctor may be added to the Command Staff and report directly to the

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Based on the event, or as an incident grows in size or severity, the Incident Commander may delegate authority to perform certain tasks.

The **Public Information Officer** (PIO) is responsible for providing event or incident communication to the public and others. This position reports directly to the Incident Commander and should not release information without first obtaining approval.

The **Safety Officer** (SO) monitors the operations and advises the Incident Commander of issues related to the safety of residents, staff, and those who are responding to the incident. Safety inspections and reviews must be ongoing. Steps to eliminate hazardous situations or stop unsafe acts may be taken immediately by the SO.

The **Liaison Officer** (LNO) is the point of contact for all other agencies that may respond to the incident. Exceptions would be:

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- The Logistics Section would be discuss obtaining supplies and equipment with vendors or others
- Those providing resident care may call directly to the health care provider, public health or hospital
- The information officer would speak directly to the public, media, or others

Based on the event, others may be appointed by the Incident Commander to speak directly to other stakeholders.
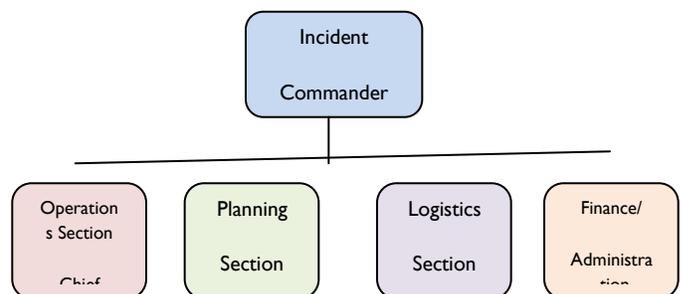
General Staff

The type and severity of the incident may require delegation of authority for the performance of management functions. Those who perform these functions are called the General Staff. They report directly to the Incident Commander. The supervisor of each function is called Chief. Until a Chief is assigned responsibility for the function, the Incident Commander has control.

```
                    Incident
                    Commander
        ┌──────────┬──────────┬──────────┐
   Operations   Planning    Logistics   Finance/
   Section      Section     Section     Administra
   Chief                                tion
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GENERAL STAFF

The General Staff are responsible for the functions they oversee and report directly to the Incident Commander. The General Staff may delegate authority

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Operations Section

The Operations Section is supervised by the Chief develops and manages the operations to fulfill the objectives approved by the Incident Commander. This person usually possesses a great knowledge of: the problem, the organization, technical and leadership skills.

The Operations Section Chief may divide the Section into Groups based on functional areas.

The person who oversees the functional area is called the Group Supervisor.

During the flood described above, what types of Operations may be necessary?

- Evacuate the facility
- Transport residents to hospitals or other facilities
- Track and account for residents and staff
- Provide medical services
- Provide mental health services
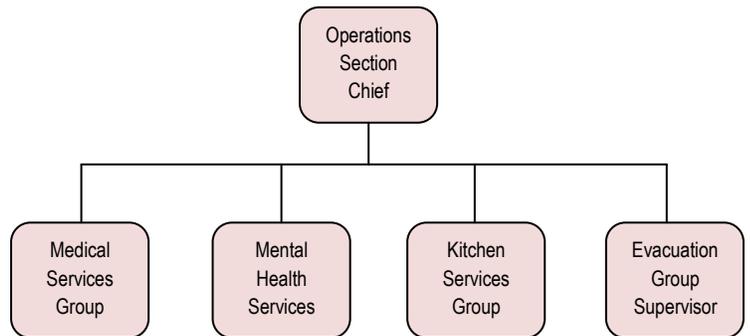- Assure residents and staff receive food and water

These types of Operations would be grouped and assigned a supervisor. The command chart would expand. It may appear as:

These Groups may be divided into Branches and a Director appointed. One example may be:
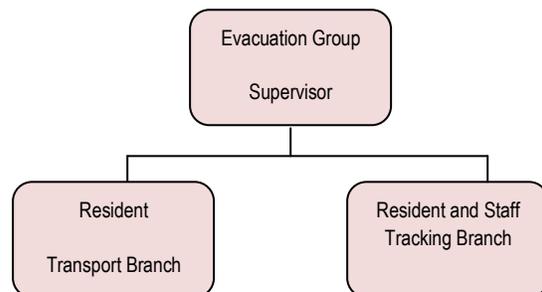
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If there is need for a Planning Section, the Incident Commander will designate a Planning Chief. If it is not deemed necessary, the Incident Commander will perform any planning functions.

This Section could be divided into four units.

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                    Planning
                    Section
                    Chief
   ┌────────────┬──────┴──────┬────────────┐
Resource     Situation    Documentatio   Demobilization
Unit         Unit         n Unit         Unit
Leader       Leader       Leader         Leader
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Some of the responsibilities of the Units may be:

Resource Unit

Develop and maintain the Incident Action Plan.

Create and recommend implementation of Memorandums of Understanding or Memorandums of Agreement, with agencies that may be called upon to provide assistance during the incident.

Situation Unit

Collect and analyzes information, develops maps, and summaries.

Documentation Unit

Maintain and archive all incident related documentation.

Demobilization Unit

Assure that resources are released for incident in a safe, cost-effective manner.

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Based on the size and structure of the organization, one person may be responsible for these tasks. This individual may be either the Incident Commander or the Planning Section Chief.

Information regarding the responsibilities of each unit is given to increase your knowledge of the expectations during an incident.

Do You Know?

Who in your organization could assume the role of Planning Section Chief?

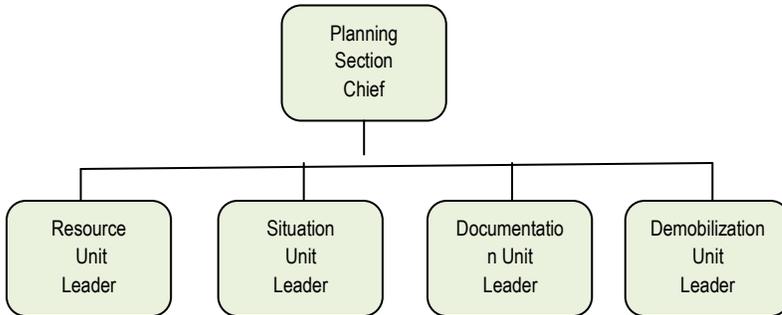*Skills required are: organized, forward thinking, ability to analyze information, communicate well, collect information, and maintain documentation.*

Possible candidates for this position: Administrator, Planner, Associate Director.

Logistics Section

The Incident Commander will decide if there is a need for a Logistics Section. If so, an individual to fill the role of Logistics Section Chief will be named. If deemed not necessary, it is expected that the Incident Commander will perform all necessary logistical tasks.

Based on the size and severity of the event and the response, the Logistics Sections can be staffed to include the following branches and units.

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                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │  Logistics   │
                    │  Section     │
                    │  Chief       │
                    └──────┬───────┘
              ┌────────────┴────────────┐
      ┌───────┴────────┐        ┌───────┴────────┐
      │ Service Branch │        │ Support Branch │
      │   Director     │        │   Director     │
      └───────┬────────┘        └───────┬────────┘
              │                         │
     ┌────────┴────────┐       ┌────────┴────────┐
     │ Communications  │       │  Supply Unit    │
     │ Unit            │       │  Leader         │
     │ Leader          │       └─────────────────┘
     └─────────────────┘
     ┌─────────────────┐       ┌─────────────────┐
     │ Medical Unit    │       │ Facilities Unit │
     │ Leader          │       │ Leader          │
     └─────────────────┘       └─────────────────┘
     ┌─────────────────┐       ┌─────────────────┐
     │ Food Unit       │       │ Transport       │
     │ Leader          │       │ Support Unit    │
     └─────────────────┘       │ Leader          │
                               └─────────────────┘
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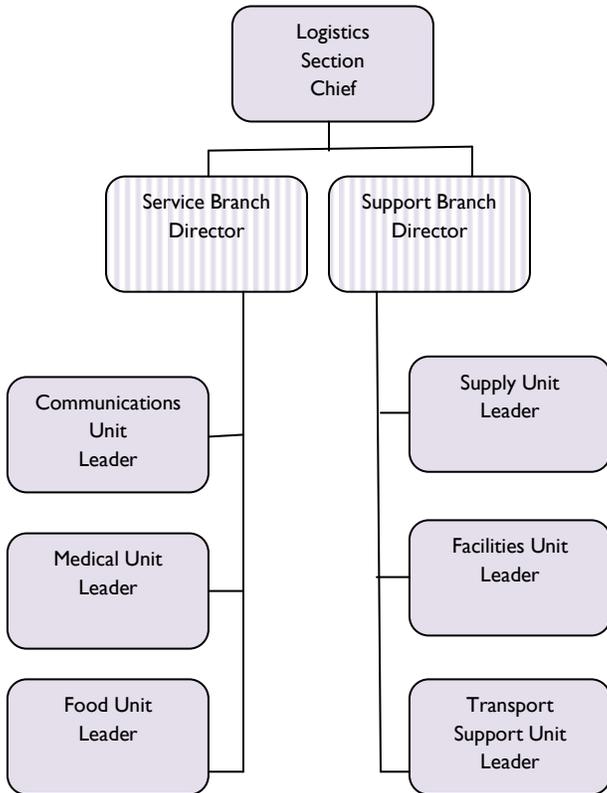
Communication Unit Develops and implements the Communication Plan, distributes and maintains communications equipment

Medical Unit Provides first aid and light medical treatment for personnel assigned to the incident. (This is a separate function than providing medical services for residents of the facility which is an emergency operation.)

Food Unit Obtain supplies, food, and drinking water for the facilities, staff, and residents. Assure equipment to prepare food is available and operable.

Supply Unit Determine the type and amount of supplies needed to support the incident. Order, receive, and distribute supplies and equipment. Maintain inventory to assure operations have necessary materials throughout the incident.

Facilities Unit Establish and maintain facilities to support the incident. Assure security, maintenance services, utilities, sanitation, and clean-up are provided.

Ground Support Unit Develop a plan to transport residents, if necessary. Assure fuel, maintenance of vehicles, and repair, if necessary. Also arrange for the transport of staff, supplies, equipment, food, and medical care products.

Do You Know?

Who in your organization could assume the role of Logistics Chief?

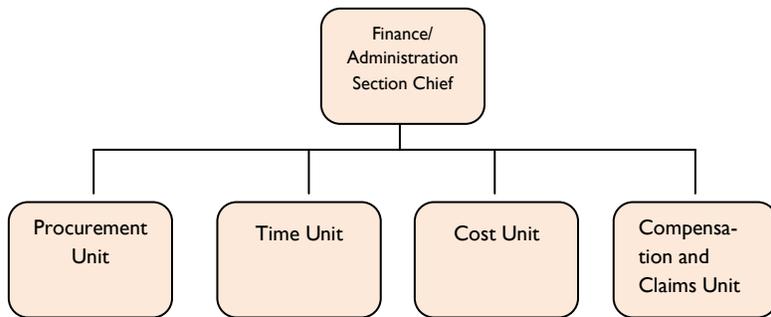*Those with similar skills are usually found in the Purchasing Department.*

It is helpful if contact information for sources of necessary resources is included as an appendix to your Emergency Operations Plan.

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Finance/Administration Section

The Incident Commander will decide if there is a need for a Finance Section. If so, an individual to fill the role of Finance Section Chief will be named. If deemed not necessary, it is expected that the Incident Commander will perform all necessary finance related functions.

These functions may include: timekeeping, accounting, compensation for injury or damage, setting up credit accounts, contract monitoring. If the size of the organization permits, the Finance Chief may create for units. They are established based on need.

```
              Finance/
           Administration
           Section Chief
                 |
    ┌────────┬───────┴───────┬──────────────┐
Procurement  Time Unit    Cost Unit    Compensa-
  Unit                                  tion and
                                       Claims Unit
```

Procurement Unit   Responsible for all financial matters pertaining to vendors, leases and fiscal agreements

Time Unit   Responsible for personnel time keeping and recording

Cost Unit   Collect cost data, provide cost estimations, and performs analyses

Claims Unit   Responsible for overall and management of administrative matters such as: injury claims

medical care products.

Importance of Utilization of ICS in Long Term Care and Senior Living Facilities

Disasters have disproportionate effects on the elderly. They may: be unable to respond rapidly, experience sensory deprivation, have chronic illnesses and mobility impairment, be bedridden, or cognitively impaired. The facilities in which they reside are, in many cases, understaffed to meet the needs of this vulnerable population during a major emergency or disaster.

The loss of life and devastation that was experienced due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, along with other natural disasters throughout the country, have brought realization that long term care and senior living facilities are extremely vulnerable.

The Incident Command System allows all sectors within an organization and those who may be called upon to respond during an emergency or disaster, to work together effectively. Through command and control, communication, and utilization of common terminology, various disciplines meld to form a well functioning team. All levels of government, private businesses, health care and volunteer organizations have adopted this system. Utilization of ICS by those who care for this vulnerable population, establishes the foundation for an integrated response.

To demonstrate the importance of ICS in Long-Term Care and Senior Living Facilities, the following testimonial is included, It was sent to Mather LifeWays from an organization that learned of and

implemented ICS as a result of the Mather LifeWays PREPARE program.

For about a week, the weather channel was warning of the 'storm of the century' approaching the Pacific Northwest. Ahead of the storm, however, was a mass of cold air. The Portland, Oregon news channels seemed much more focused on the possibility of snow coming to Portland. Meanwhile, the Coast Natives mostly dismissed the storm feeling it was hyped up by the media and we were well experienced with wind storms.

In response to what we had learned through PREPARE, our facilities had put into place a Disaster Response Team and we had been meeting regularly for several months previous, discussing disaster preparedness, our ability to respond and modifying our plans to reflect the language and responses we had learned.

The previous plan called for the Administrator to be summoned by phone, in the event of a disaster and/or emergency and from there identified staff would be recalled to head up specific tasks. In our revisions we initiated the role of Incident Commander and identified responsibility by tasks rather than persons. This change provides needed immediate authority at a time when responses could very well be critical. The Incident Commander, usually the shift charge nurse, then uses existing staff in the building to accomplish needed tasks until such time as other staff; specifically our previously identified disaster response team, arrives. We also revised our plan to include that the disaster response team return to the facilities as soon as they gain knowledge of a current or pending disaster. This knowledge could come through the media and/or observation rather than being dependent upon a phone call. Another change made as a result of our PREPARE training was to expand our plan to include a designated person to be responsible in the event of family members of staff and/or residents would seek refuge in our building and also a designated person to coordinate 'admissions' of those in fragile condition that might require care and shelter in our facilities. We had specifically identified our in-home care clients.

*The storm of the century did arrive, with a vengeance. There were sustained winds of 60 – 80 mph that*

continued for more than 48 hours, with gusts that reached as high as 150 mph. Damage was wide spread, the entire county was without power and to add insult to injury, our communications system was limited. There was limited phone service, spotty cell phone service and the 911 system was not working. With trees, debris and downed power lines travel was dangerous and extremely limited locally, and access to Portland where mail our pharmaceuticals, gasoline, and food came was totally cut off. Our Assisted Living Facility was inaccessible having two power poles down across the entrance. No one was allowed to enter or leave.

Our response…..

The night shift charge nurse became the Incident Commander and had the authority to make the decision that staff could not leave until a replacement arrived. This was especially critical at our Assisted Living Facility where staff replacements did not have access to the facility for a couple days. As winds continued to blow, it was amazing how many staff members did arrive, driving around trees, dodging flying debris and driving over downed power lines, including the majority of our disaster response team; many of which were not accessible by phone.

In team meetings, that began that first morning with the wind still blowing, it was determined we needed to prepare to be without power for several days and identification was made of 'assets' and 'deficits'. An immediate concern was refueling our generators, attaining pharmaceuticals; access to fuel for staff, provision of beds for frail elderly, and resources for staff to assure their comfort and safety and that of their families. These concerns had been identified and discussed and possible resources identified at our disaster response team meetings prior to the disaster. As facility administrator, and now in the position of Incident Commander, I began immediately to work on these concerns. The simple act of having identified them prior to the disaster, made the response both timely and smooth, and in the end, met.

Having staff identified and trained to oversee tasks was also very helpful. Over the course of the power outage, which lasted seven days, we did become a refuge center and took in about 18 people and also had the flexibility to
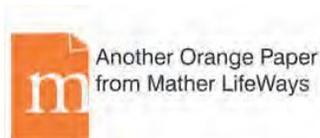
The Incident Command System

allow staff to bring dependent children to work with them. This did not go as smoothly as we would have hoped, but it was a learning experience and lessons learned will help us in the event of another disaster.

~Executive Director for the Health District and the Licensed Nursing Home Administrator

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